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ART. VI. — NEW AMERICAN NOVELS.*

MR. HENRY JAMES'S latest book has had, as it deserved to have, a somewhat exceptional reception. Not only has it been the subject of more careful and excellent criticism than has fallen to the lot of any other American novel of recent years, but it has called forth, both in print and elsewhere, much of that earnest discussion which is the best evidence of the impression made by uncommonly strong work; and in this instance the discussion has been of more than ordinary value in itself.

There has been no question — as, indeed, we think there can be none — with regard to Mr. James's novel, looked at from one point of view. The perfection of his literary skill is almost beyond cavil. His style has rare, strong qualities in admirable combination. It is delicate without weakness; there is a peculiar refinement in it, without a touch of pedantry or a moment's sacrifice of idiomatic force; it is rich without being fantastic, and individual without mannerisms. In this Mr. James compels the tribute of a hearty admiration; and we join willingly with those who give it without reservation. Whatever may be in dispute about him, he is, before all things, a master of the technical portion of his art, and so easily first among the men around him that we should look in vain, perhaps, for a comparison. What Mr. Howells wrote of his first book is true of all he has produced; it is "a marvel of delightful workmanship."

But the discussion with regard to "The American" has been upon another point; and one which concerns not only Mr. James's

* *The American*. By HENRY JAMES, JR. Boston: J. R. Osgood & Co.

Garth: a Novel. By JULIAN HAWTHORNE. New York: D. Appleton & Co.

A Modern Mephistopheles. Boston: Roberts Brothers. (No Name Series.)

That Lass o' Lowrie's. By FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT. New York: Scribner, Armstrong, & Co.

The Jericho Road. Chicago: Jansen, McClurg, & Co.

The Barton Experiment. By the Author of "Helen's Babies." New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

The Scripture Club of Valley Rest. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Nimpoort. Boston: Lockwood, Brooks, & Co. (Wayside Series.)

First Love is Best. By GAIL HAMILTON. Boston: Estes & Lauriat. (Cobweb Series.)

own prospective place in literature, but incidentally involves, in some degree, the dangerously broad question what a great novel really is.

Mr. James has given us a book appealing almost entirely — we are tempted to say wholly — to the reader's intellectual side. The enjoyment we derive from it is purely intellectual enjoyment. It is obvious to the warmest of his admirers (we do not count ourselves the least among the number), that imagination is not the impelling force with him; that he does not write under the pressure of a strong creative power. On the contrary, he is the representative of a class of men to whom, ordinarily, expression does not seem worth while; of Emerson's "great silent crowd" of highly cultured lookers-on, who feel no impulse toward speech. Even those of them who have the power are apt to feed so long upon the lotus-leaves of a certain kind of modern æsthetic culture, and to be so well satisfied with their meal, that they grow indisposed to all production. Often they drift into criticism of an unproductive kind; but even when they find voice and the wish to use it, they very rarely seek expression through the novel. The influence of their intellectual lotus-eating has taken the vivid dramatic interest out of life for them; they are — to borrow a word from the only race that could have coined it — entirely *désillusionné*. It is a rare strength that enables Mr. James to be in this class and yet not of it. But it has not been quite great enough to enable him to shake off the habit of one who is altogether a *spectator ab extra*; the critic and the analyst, rather than the sharer, of strong feeling.

Not that he is not immeasurably far away from that class of writers who make the reader feel as though he were attending merely on a series of experiments, — a kind of psychological clinic; the quality of his art alone would keep him from any error such as this. With him what Leslie Stephen calls "the cool, hard, and steady hand necessary for psychological dissection" is gentle and kindly in its touch. You do not notice it; you are not conscious of its passage, or of the work that it is doing. Only, he is contented with the mere exhibition of his skill and accuracy; consciously he seems to stop there, as though there were no need of going further. It is not necessary that you should feel when the persons of his story feel, — only that you should see that *they* are feeling. It is not needful that you should be in *rappor*t with them, — that when a bundle of nerves is laid bare you should feel each

one tingle, and when a glimpse of a passion is discovered you should be put in keen enough sympathy with it to know the rest. The delicate and subtle analysis is followed throughout with all a student's interest; but it is an interest that attaches almost altogether to the process, very little to its suggestions or results, and least of all to the characters that may have been its subjects.

We do not ask for better bread than can be made with wheat, however; nor appreciate "The American" the less because it seems to us rather an almost perfect study, than a piece of completed or in any sense creative work. It is only because Mr. James stands so near the very head of the school in which he has enrolled himself, that what he writes inevitably raises a question as to the limitations of that school. If we doubt whether he and his companions are not confined, by the very conditions of their method, to the production of admirable specimens of skilful workmanship instead of real creations, we do not listen the less hopefully to those of his critics who believe that he will prove the doubt a groundless one. In the reaction which is strong just now against all crudity and carelessness there is danger that they may expect of his rare skill some things which skill alone cannot supply; yet he has shown himself so thoroughly a master in all that he has undertaken, that the one step higher may also be within his power.

Nationality and surroundings are the only things "The American" of Mr. James's present story has in common with the heroes of "Roderick Hudson" and the shorter sketches that made up its author's earlier volume. Christopher Newman is a new type with him; a more strongly marked and finished one than any he has touched before, and one so carefully studied that it is impossible to give a fair idea of it without the fine lights and shades of his own admirable picture. There is nothing of its kind in fiction better than the paragraph in which this hero first appears, — a man who "fills out the national mould with an almost ideal completeness." "But he was not only a fine American; he was, in the first place, physically, a fine man. He appeared to possess that kind of health and strength which, when found in perfection, are the most impressive, — the physical capital which the owner does nothing to 'keep up.' If he was a muscular Christian, it was quite without knowing it. If it was necessary to walk to a remote spot, he walked, but he had never known himself to 'exercise.' He had no theory with regard

to cold bathing or the use of Indian clubs ; he was neither an oarsman, a rifleman, nor a fencer ; he had never had time for these amusements, and he was quite unaware that the saddle is recommended for certain forms of indigestion. . . . His usual attitude and carriage were of a rather relaxed and lounging kind ; but when, under a special inspiration, he straightened himself, he looked like a grenadier on parade. . . . He had a very well formed head, with a shapely, symmetrical balance of the frontal and the occipital development, and a good deal of straight, rather dry, brown hair. His complexion was brown, and his nose had a bold, well-marked arch. His eye was of a clear, cold gray, and, save for a rather abundant mustache, he was clean-shaved. He had the flat jaw and sinewy neck which are frequent in the American type ; but the traces of national origin are a matter of expression, even more than of feature, and it was in this respect that our friend's countenance was supremely eloquent. . . . It had that typical vagueness which is not vacuity, that blankness which is not simplicity, that look of being committed to nothing in particular, of standing in an attitude of general hospitality to the chances of life, of being very much at one's own disposal, so characteristic of many American faces. It was our friend's eye that chiefly told his story ; an eye in which innocence and experience were singularly blended. . . . Frigid and yet friendly, frank yet cautious, shrewd yet credulous, positive yet sceptical, confident yet shy, extremely intelligent and extremely good-humored, there was something vaguely defiant in its concessions, and something profoundly reassuring in its reserve. The cut of this gentleman's mustache, with the two premature wrinkles in the cheek above it, and the fashion of his garments, in which an exposed shirt-front and a cerulean cravat played perhaps an obtrusive part, completed the conditions of his identity."

This unsurpassed bit of description is so absolutely necessary to any comment on the story in which Newman plays a part, that we make no apology for the length of the quotation. With it, the general conception of the novel is half told. Newman had lived the vigorous, quickly successful life of such a man ; among other things he had made himself an early fortune. "Life had been for him an open game, and he had played for high stakes. He had won at last and carried off his winnings ; and now, what was he to do with them ?" The first suggestions of this question had led

him to give up business at thirty-six, — not formally, as men do ordinarily, but suddenly, from a momentary, overmastering impulse. He became suddenly aware that there was another life whose possibilities he had not tested. "I seemed," he says to his friend Tristram, "to feel a new man inside my old skin, and I longed for a new world. . . . As soon as I could get out of the game I sailed for Europe." This was how "The American" came to be in Paris. Knowing the man, how fresh a type he represents in fiction, how familiar a one, in fact, — catching immediately the full spirit of Mr. James's purpose in putting him suddenly in high relief against a background so opposite in color, we follow the story from these first few pages with an interest which is never suffered to flag, through a succession of character studies that are most perfect exhibitions of literary skill.

Madame de Cintr , who, with her surroundings, makes up that sharp contrast to his leading character without which Mr. James is never quite content, is to our mind the least successful figure in the book. We can well understand that a certain vagueness and haziness about his delineation of her should be a part of Mr. James's plan, for the sharp, decisive lines of Newman are thus most effectively brought out; but we are not prepared to find her so colorless as to seem somewhat inconsistent with the part she has to play. Beside the women of "Roderick Hudson" she is certainly not a successful piece of drawing; and the ability that Mr. James there showed in the depicting of his heroines leads to a little disappointment that Madame de Cintr  should be left so mere an outline.

To atone for this, however, Mr. James has devoted more attention to his minor characters than is his habit; in this case possibly because each one of them adds such a vivid touch of color to the contrasted ground against which his leading figure stands, as we have said, in high relief. Madame de Cintr 's mother, Madame de Bellegarde, the central stone of that hard wall against which poor Newman strikes, is a masterpiece of skilful drawing. Her "white, intense, respectable countenance, and its circumscribed smile, suggested a document signed and sealed; a thing of parchment, ink, and ruled lines. 'She is a woman of conventions and proprieties,' he [Newman] said to himself as he looked at her; 'her world is the world of things immutably decreed. But how

she is at home in it, and what a paradise she finds it! She walks about in it as if it were a blooming park, a Garden of Eden; and when she sees "This is genteel" or "This is improper" written on a milestone, she stops ecstatically, as if she were listening to a nightingale or smelling a rose." Her son, Urbain de Bellegarde, the head of the house, is scarce behind this picture. "He was 'distinguished' to the tips of his polished nails, and there was not a movement of his fine, perpendicular person that was not noble and majestic. Newman had never yet been confronted with such an incarnation of the art of taking one's self seriously; he felt a sort of impulse to step backward, as you do to get a view of a great façade." Best of all, however, is a less serious figure than Mr. James is wont to draw, Madame de Cintré's younger brother Valentin. A thorough Frenchman, a thorough light-heart through and through, — the only appearance in Mr. James's books of a type that Thackeray himself might have created, — Valentin is as living a personage as Newman himself. "The great point in his face," says a passage that describes him, "was that it was intensely alive, — frankly, ardently, gallantly alive. The look of it was like a bell, of which the handle might have been in the young man's soul; at a touch of the handle it rang with a loud, silver sound. There was something in his quick, light-brown eye which assured you that he was not economizing his consciousness. He was not living in a corner of it to spare the furniture of the rest. He was squarely encamped in the centre and he was keeping open house. When he smiled, it was like the movement of a person who in emptying a cup turns it upside down: he gave you the last drop of his jollity. He inspired Newman with something of the same kindness that our hero used to feel in his earlier years for those of his companions who could perform strange and clever tricks, — make their joints crack in queer places or whistle at the back of their mouths."

The ending of the novel will disappoint many beside those who look for a conventional *dénouement*. Its inconsistency with all the probabilities of Newman's character has been the chief objection brought against it by the critics; and it is a sound one. But to us there seems to be another fault as well. The close is somewhat blurred and ineffective; the point that Mr. James seeks to make in his last pages is lost in a vagueness which leaves the

reader not unsatisfied, as much strong work will do inevitably, — but positively discontented, and searching dimly for some reason why such sharp and tangible purposes and figures should pass so quickly into smoke.

It is a singular transition from "The American" to Mr. Julian Hawthorne's "Garth"; and yet in a literary sense the one most clearly points the moral of the other. In precisely that direction in which Mr. James is strong lies Mr. Hawthorne's greatest weakness. Were the two painters, one would use his rather cold, gray tints to fill out perfect drawing; down to its minutest accessory his picture would be studied and worked into perfect harmony; every trifle would be filled with the spirit of the whole; and if all should be covered up except a blown-out candle or a crumpled letter, that bit would indicate the story in each line. The other, conscious that he had some warm colors on his palette, would seek, perhaps half consciously, to make them do duty on his canvas in place of all the patient toil and care of art; handle them in a rather aimless way, content with an occasional effect; satisfied, apparently, to extort the confession that he had some powers, but lacking that which compels a man to finished and faithful performance.

Mr. Hawthorne, we mean to say, has always seemed to us a notable example of the want of a certain literary ambition, — what a critic has called "a reverent ideal of work," which Mr. James possesses very fully. Not that we would be understood as accusing the author of "Garth" of a lack of what is called "literary conscience," of a conscious misuse of either his abilities or his material; it is not this that we refer to. It is a certain carelessness and aimlessness; a want of clear conception in beginning, and of that staying quality which keeps him true to his purpose till it is wrought out completely. His novels always read as if he had grown tired of them before they were half done, and had finished them because he must, with work that now and then is almost slovenly. It is for this reason that his magazine stories and sketches are, in our opinion, so much better than any book that he has ever written.

We do not say all this because "Garth" is either a commonplace, or, in the ordinary sense, an unsuccessful novel; it is neither of these things. Far beyond any book that its author has yet published, it will be in some sense a revelation to those who have

known Mr. Hawthorne only through his "Bressant" and "Idolatry." But it is none the less a new and well-marked instance of the weakness which is the chief hindrance to his progress, and the chief drawback to any real enjoyment of his stories. The first hundred pages of the novel — the story of Garth Urmson's childhood, and notably the chapters on his boyish love and psychological experiences — are in nearly all ways simply charming. Mr. Hawthorne is working at his best, and his best means a great deal. There is a warmth and strength in his keen sympathy with nature, and something gentle and delicate in the way in which he treats Garth's boyish passion, and all the phases of his mental growth, that are very winning. The conception of the story, too, is shadowed forth in such a way that high hopes are excited, and we begin to appreciate how excellent and well-told a story Garth's might be. But the check comes. The power is not sustained; the strong effects are massed here and there to little purpose; the plot grows intricate without the slightest gain in interest or force. The reader's progress through the story becomes a mere wandering through a maze, the end of which he foresees so clearly that he ceases to care very much about it; while he is not sure that the author himself has a very clear idea by which path he shall lead him to it, and suspicions are excited that several changes of mind take place in the latter portion of the journey.

The characters are many of them strong, — Garth and his father easily chief among them, followed, at a long distance, by Madge Danver. Golightley seems to us by far too labored; Elinor incomplete and inconsistent; and inconsistency is not confined to her, but seems a necessary consequence, in all the persons of the story, of that certain aimlessness of which we have spoken as making all the ending lack the clearness of the earlier part. Were it the fashion to put books before the public marked "unfinished," as pictures are sometimes hung in exhibitions, the latter half of the story of "Garth" should be omitted, and the rest put forth as no unworthy showing of what a truly strong and excellent work Mr. Hawthorne might accomplish, if he would add to his many powers the patience of an artist.

"A Modern Mephistopheles" is an imaginative sketch, — more than half an allegory, — written with considerable grace of fancy, and with fair success in carrying out the spirit in which it was

conceived. The unknown author — who, of whichever sex, writes in this instance with both the defects and merits of a woman's pen — has given a new, fantastic dress to a world-old story, — a story that will suggest to its readers, as it does to its writer (so clearly that he feels, as it were, in duty bound to mention it), Retzsch's familiar picture of "The Game of Life."

Jasper Helwyze (whose name, by the way, is meant to fit him after the most approved models of the "Pilgrim's Progress") is seized by a sudden fancy to rescue and aid, for the ultimate purpose of a psychological experiment, a young author of whom he hears by accident, whom failure and privation have made desperate, and whom he interrupts in the midst of an attempt at suicide. The youth, Felix Canaris, accepts his new life eagerly, and in Helwyze's luxurious home — such a "dream of luxury," of course, as every writer has a prescriptive right to introduce into a story of this order, albeit architecture and the possibilities are thereby outraged — he blossoms into the beauty and vigor nature had meant him to possess, and want had hitherto kept from him. Full of all the possibilities of young manhood, he forms an admirable subject for the Mephistophelian designs of his protector; whose first desire, of course, is to gain over him a power from which he cannot well escape. The keen ambition of Canaris offers him a way. He offers to help the young author with the volume of poems he has dreamed of, yet failed to finish or to find success for. For a while Canaris labors on alone; but the inspiration will not come. Led by the stronger mind, he consents to the secret substitution of some poems by Helwyze for his own; the book comes out under Canaris's name and makes him famous. From that day he is the slave of the "modern Mephistopheles."

Naturally, we have not space or inclination to trace here the course of Helwyze's experiments, whether on the mind of his chief victim, or on the minds of the only other two characters who enter into the fantastic little story. These two are women, — and the types of women necessary to make up what may be called the psychologic quadrilateral. One is Olivia, the "sumptuous beauty," attracting all the sensuous part of Canaris's nature, but herself absorbed in a devoted worship of the master-spirit, Helwyze. The other is called Gladys, the best-drawn character the book contains, whose appeal is to the young man's better, more ideal side; the watching angel in his game.

The story is too lightly drawn to be judged by stern standards ; and the delicacy of its execution entitles it to praise. Its little faults, and even a few absurdities, are of a kind to make it seem absurdly hypercritical to comment on them harshly. If Helwyze's eyes are a little too intensely black and magnetic, if Olivia is a trifle too "sumptuous," and "the villa," as we intimated, magnificent beyond the power of all upholstery, why should we quarrel with the too liberal fancy that created them ? "A Modern Mephistopheles" remains a fresh and dainty fantasy ; and this was all its author offered.

"That Lass o' Lowrie's" is a novel American by authorship, though its scene is laid in the coal-region of English Lancashire ; in which county, if a current newspaper paragraph may be believed, the author of the book, Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett, passed some years of girlhood. It is essentially a well-told story, of a not extraordinary sort, but chiefly noteworthy for the excellence of its local color, and for one or two well-drawn types of character. The heroine, a pit-girl surrounded by every kind of coarsening influence, doing a man's work in the mines, and beaten and bullied by a brutal father, is the strong figure of the novel ; and Mrs. Burnett's merit lies in this, — that she succeeds in bringing out the whole womanliness of this girl's nature, and in showing her development into an altogether different being, and yet does not call in cant or impossible absurdities to aid her in the task. Joan Lowrie is by no means one of those familiar characters who, in the midst of a phenomenally vicious career, suddenly grow seraphic wings before the very eyes of the observer, and begin incontinently to chatter the platitudes that mark "a change of heart." Her mental growth is quiet and consistent, on the whole ; and if her natural strengths at the beginning are a little puzzling to one disposed to reason logically from her education and surroundings, yet we are far from saying that they are impossible.

Some of the minor characters are excellently done, — notably "owd" Sammy Craddock, the village oracle and humorist, and Jud, a refreshingly natural and unregenerate boy. The leading persons, — excepting always Joan herself, — though not ill-drawn, are more conventional ; nor is the story's plot a very new one apart from its fresh dress, — not new enough, at all events, to con-

tain any surprises for the least-hardened novel-reader. Fergus Derrick, the London engineer sent down to take charge of Riggan collieries, — somewhat of a muscular Christian, who strides “like a young son of Anak, brains and muscle evenly balanced and fully developed,” — is by no means a new acquaintance, and has no unfamiliar part to play. Large odds might be given (to speak after the worldly fashion), that he would reform the coal-pits, thrash the local bully (who in this case chances to be Joan Lowrie’s father), and become a hero to Joan herself. But he is a good healthy type of hero, like others of his school, and we have no quarrel with him. His friend Paul Grace, the “little parson,” frail and sensitive, but full of pluck in a crisis, also has his prototypes in other fiction, yet is not an unwelcome figure; and has his natural companion in Anice Barholm, the rector’s daughter, who is the feminine agent in Joan’s elevation, and who, to her glory be it said, justifies the praise that one of her poor protégés bestows upon her, — “Yo’ dunnot harry me wi’ talk.” It is because it does not “harry us wi’ talk” that Mrs. Burnett’s novel is successful above others of its kind.

We were not in the least prepared, we willingly confess, to find much pleasure in the three short stories, “The Jericho Road,” “The Barton Experiment,” and “The Scripture Club of Valley Rest.” All of them are announced, though not upon their title-pages, as having the same author, Mr. John Habberton, whose last year’s trifle, “Helen’s Babies,” proved a success that may have marked a white day in the calendar of its publisher, but certainly gave not the faintest promise of better or more serious work upon its writer’s part. If we have been agreeably disappointed, we would not convey the idea — unjust alike to Mr. Habberton and to ourselves — that it is because we have found in these three Western sketches anything of great intrinsic value. More purely tentative, experimental bits of writing could hardly be imagined; and it is so obvious that they are nothing more, that we are almost sorry to see them clothed in the dignity of separate volumes, instead of passing their ephemeral lives between the covers of the magazines, or gaining at most the permanence of a “collection.” Their worth is simply in their revelation of new possibilities; in promises concerning the fulfilment of which we cannot prophesy, since that depends on Mr. Habberton’s own earnestness, the quality of his

ambition, and his ability to rid himself of certain crudities not only of expression, but of thought.

All the stories deal with a kind of Western life that is altogether new to literature ; not the Pike County civilization of John Hay's ballads, nor the picturesque barbarism of Bret Harte's mining country, but the hard, prosaic, and angular life of villages on Western lakes and rivers ; life that has grown up within moral and social lines as rigid and ungraceful as "fever an' ager" ever made the gaunt contours of those who live it. The types of character that Mr. Habberton chooses to treat cannot be overlaid with sentimentalism ; and the one fact would show his art to be beyond the common, that he has kept them from being only repellent and useless studies of pure harshness, for which their mere fidelity to nature could hardly be a sufficient *raison d'être*. In spite of all their utter want of picturesqueness, and in spite, too, of the rather stiff didactic purpose which is almost naïvely stated as the motive for his giving us their story, he has made his people very human, and his local coloring so nearly perfect as to show a power he ought not to neglect.

We have not space to go into the detail of the stories. By far the best of them, "The Jericho Road," is concerned with the problem of what may happen to the weak member of a rude society when, as Mr. Habberton puts it in his preface, the Good Samaritan does not come along. "The Barton Experiment" is the history of a "Temperance Reform" in Barton Village, wherein the reformers' eyes were opened to certain practical aspects of the matter of intemperance and the community's business with the drunkard, which had hitherto escaped them, as they have escaped the eyes of other and more cultured classes. "The Scripture Club of Valley Rest" pleases us least of all the three, — not because in its history of the shades of opinion, the difficulties and the types of character appearing in the Bible-class of a village church, it approaches more closely to a purely didactic book than even either of the others ; but because its figures are so much more crudely drawn, and show so much less invention and spirit than the two earlier stories lead us to expect.

Mr. Habberton is entering upon his work as heavily handicapped as a new author can be, — weighted with a meaningless success, and with the constant temptation to do hurried work because he

knows a similar success awaits whatever he may publish. But in the "Jericho Road" and the "Barton Experiment" there is distinct evidence of a talent which should in time give better results than these two trifles.

The books whose titles end our somewhat random list may be described without injustice in the compass of a paragraph. "Nim-port" is clearly the production of a writer who has his hardest lesson yet to learn in the subordination of his own somewhat obtrusive cleverness, before the few uneven merits of his work can bear a large proportion to its great defects. To write a volume with so obvious an effort to say telling things, and not to say any, would be beyond the power of any person moderately equipped with wit and general reading; so that "Nimport" is not altogether without its epigrams and touches of good characterization. Yet, as a whole, it cannot but be rated wearisome; and the bad habit of a leading person of the story, in communicating her adventures in letters of that odious kind written to be read aloud amid the hearers' praises of their "cleverness," can only be a warning to many wise novel-readers that the book is to be shunned. Gail Hamilton's "First Love is Best" is simpler in its style and altogether better than what might perhaps be looked for by habitual readers of its author's works; and yet it fully justifies her long apology for entering upon the novelist's domain. What is good in this story would have been still better said in the essay form in which she has already written — somewhat overwritten, possibly. And what is otherwise than good might thus have passed unnoticed, being of that peculiar sort of commonplace which never strikes one as particularly stupid till put into the mouths of characters in fiction.

EDWARD L. BURLINGAME.